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How's Our World Doing?

IN 1945, AS AN IDEALISTIC young reporter, I covered the founding of the United Nations in San Francisco. World War II was ending, and I went home to Illinois full of hope that future conflicts might be avoided. I was wrong, of course, but we have kept out of World War III.

In 1972, as a more seasoned observer, I covered the UN conference at Stockholm set up to examine worldwide environmental threats. After debate, the delegates voted to create a permanent United Nations Environment Program. This time I went home more cautious, yet hopeful that the people of the world could keep from fouling their own nests.

Of course, the new international body could not end environmental problems any more than the UN could end war. But it has helped. And *International Wildlife* has been in the forefront of reporting how.

Three months before the Stockholm conference, its director-general, Maurice Strong, asked us to assemble a World Environmental Index. This feature appeared in our July-August 1972 issue—the only nongovernment publication distributed to the delegates.

Now, exactly 15 years after that key meeting, and doubtless wiser with hindsight, Maurice Strong airs his views on how the world is doing. A provocative interview with him begins on page 36.

John Strohm

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4

4 TERRY SHORTT: A LIFE'S JOURNEY INTO NATURE
By Robert McCracken Peck
How the last of the great field artists brought our wild world alive

12 A DEADLY BUSINESS
Story and photographs by Howard Hall
Divers in the Philippines collect venomous sea serpents to feed a growing market for snakeskin goods

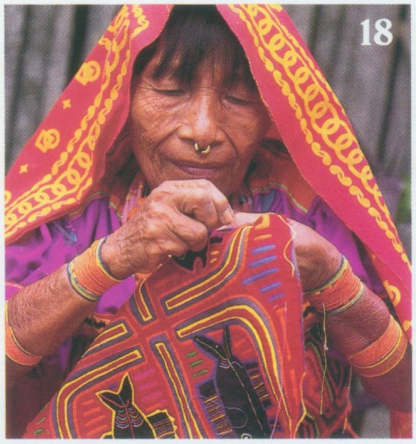
16 MY CLOSE CALL WITH A RHINO
By Fiona Sunquist
In the wilds of Nepal our roving editor comes face-to-face with a killer

18 KUNA INDIANS: BUILDING A BRIGHT FUTURE
By Norman Myers
Photographs by David Cavagnaro
A Panamanian tribe guards its homeland by setting up a nature preserve

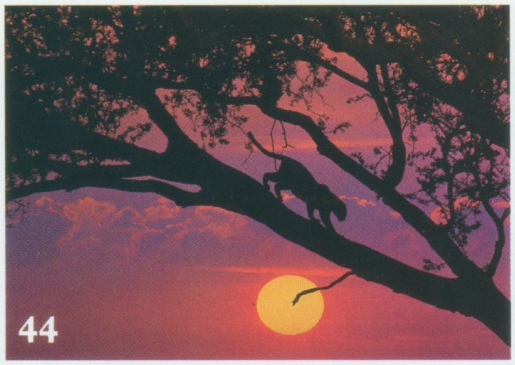
25 WILDLIFE DIGEST
Summary of late-breaking news, views and issues

30 DAZZLING!
By Noel Vietmeyer
Legumes can be downright brilliant

36 WHAT HAPPENED TO UTOPIA?
International conservationist Maurice Strong looks warily at the state of the Earth



18



44

38 THE TERMITE CONNECTION
By David M. Schwartz
A half ton of termites for every person on Earth may be enough to change the world's climate

44 MYSTERY, IMMENSITY AND SOLITUDE
Photographs by Reinhard Künkel
East Africa's vast plains and teeming wildlife come alive in words and pictures

ABOUT OUR COVERS:

Front: The African saddlebill, with its characteristic yellow patch, is one of the world's tallest storks. For this portrait in the Masai Mara of Kenya, Frans Lanting used a Nikon FE2 camera, 600mm Nikkor lens and Kodachrome 64 film.

Back: Native to Central and South America, the raccoonlike kinkajou has sharp, curved claws for climbing. Rod Williams (Bruce Coleman Ltd.) used an Olympus OM2 camera, Tamron 90mm macro lens, Metz electronic flash and Kodachrome film to photograph this captive female.

My close call with a RHINO

In the wilds of Nepal one of our roving editors comes face-to-face with a hot-tempered killer

By Fiona Sunquist

WE PEERED at the the flimsy blind through the dim light of dawn. Bodai, my elephant driver, clicked his tongue disapprovingly. "No good," he said, thinking of rhinos, "you can't stay there. It's too dangerous."

Bodai nudged the elephant closer. My prospective hiding place was three feet square and consisted of four tree branches stuck into the mud. A few feet off the ground they drooped over to form a roof of sorts, but the sides were thin and almost leafless in places. We could see straight through it.

I was in a small grassy glade in Chitwan National Park in Nepal. At its center was a dark, milk-tea-colored wallow that smelled strongly of rhino urine. I had spent a great deal of time crouched in small blinds in places like this, so despite Bodai's warnings, I decided to stay. Little did I realize what a serious miscalculation that was to become.

After first adding a few new branches to the blind's framework until it was slightly less transparent, I set up the camera, organized my belongings and began the silent wait, ears pricked for advance warning of activity. Swollen by recent rain, the water in the wallow reached to within ten yards of the blind. Red-vented bulbuls splashed and fluffed their feathers in the evil-smelling muck. Two matronly peahens, handsome in their autumn finery, sailed majestically out of the shadows to sip their morning drink, and somewhere in the branches above, the quavering voice of a brown fish owl chuckled like an old man.

Sitting in a blind is not nearly as boring as it sounds. In some ways, it is like being out in the forest at night. Vision is restricted, and you have to locate and identify sounds—categorize them before their source comes into sight: birds hopping, the slow, nervous steps of a barking deer, wild piglets screaming at their mother for milk. Some creatures, like jungle fowl, make far too much noise for their size, and others, like the giant sambar deer, are there before you know it and just as silently gone.

As I watched, a pinkish-brown, bristly mongoose alternately ran and stopped, listening its way across the glade in front of me like a clockwork toy. It rooted fiercely in a pile of leaves, back arched, pouncing and chewing on invisible morsels. As I focused the camera and took a single picture, it leapt in the air, stared suspiciously at my mound of branches and left. Simultaneously, a heavy crashing sound made me jump like the nervous mongoose. Only a rhino would make such a racket.

Most rhinos are not nasty-tempered, but my fear of meeting one at close quarters bordered on paranoia. Having watched them push their way through thickets of thorns and vines that would have stopped an elephant, I had come to the conclusion that no hiding place on the ground, especially a feeble shelter of leaves and twigs like mine, was safe from their powerful bodies.

One thinks of being trampled or perhaps gored by a rhino, but it is their sharp, slashing teeth that usually prove most dangerous. Dominant males and females with calves are the most aggressive. They can be provoked by a small sound or smell and charge for no apparent reason. These animals kill and injure many more people a year in Chitwan than do tigers or leopards.

One man who had died in a rhino attack was a tailor in a nearby village. While traveling through the park to the market in Bharatpur to buy cloth, he often saw and heard rhinos but either scared them off by shouting or climbed a tree until they went away. Early one morning, he had been walking quietly down the road when he heard a rhino. He stopped and suddenly, without warning, the animal charged. It was a female with a half-grown calf. The tailor leaped for a nearby tree, grasped a branch with his arms, pulled his feet up and hung six feet off the ground. The rhino rushed by, raised her head and hit him, knocking him to the ground. She came back and rolled him over, slashing with her powerfully sharp teeth, cutting open his belly and trampling him.

One rhino in the park was especially dangerous. It was a bad-tempered male—named Triscar by a visiting scientist. Already, the animal had killed two people.

As I recalled the tailor's experience and worried about Triscar, I listened to the heavy shuffling steps approach the wallow. A round gray shape appeared at the edge of the trees. It peered around myopically, ears flapping. Its caution and relatively smooth skin gave me hope; it must be a young animal, I thought, unsure of itself and probably not dangerous to people. After considerable shuffling and peering, the rhino walked down to the wallow and settled into the water with a loud sigh.

Momentarily relieved, I took a few pictures and smiled at the frogs struggling to maintain a foothold on the rhino's shifting bulk. The forest was quieter now, the sun well above the horizon, and almost everything had retreated to the green shade of the trees. My hiding place became hotter and hotter. Sweat gathered on my forehead and dripped into my eyes. I tied a handkerchief around my head, but that, too, soon began to drip. The camera was almost too hot to handle, its blackness soaking up the sun.

In the distance, I could hear the *phuh-phuh-phuh* noise of other rhinos fighting or courting. The sound came closer and turned into a squeaking bray, like an oversized, irate donkey, and I knew the rhinos were mating. Then, with a noise like a train, they burst into the clearing—not two, but three of them.

To my untutored eye, all three seemed to be highly enraged. The smooth rhino already in the wallow stood up with a snort of alarm and backed off into the bushes. The largest of the three intruders gazed round truculently, then lifted his tail and jetted a pulsing stream of urine ten feet behind him as he walked slowly towards the water. With a rising feeling of panic, I recognized his deeply grooved horn and scarred rump. It was Triscar.

Triscar settled into the water with a grunt while the other three rhinos and I watched to see what he would do next. While the dominant male wallowed, the three other rhinos spread out and began to graze quietly in the clearing. I was surrounded.

There were no nearby trees I could climb, and it would be difficult to sneak away unnoticed. Staying put was the only option. For an hour I watched them. The smooth rhino managed to edge his way back into the wallow and settled down to sleep. Triscar flapped his ears but did not move. One of the other rhinos wandered off into the forest, while the female continued to graze. Everything seemed peaceful.

Realizing I was missing an opportunity for some good close-up pictures, I reached for my camera. But the first time the shutter clicked, Triscar raised his head. I tried again. He exploded out of the wallow in a flurry of smelly mud and water, charging straight at the smooth rhino, who rapidly retreated.

As I watched through the camera, Triscar swung his head in my direction, squinted peevishly at my hiding place, and started towards me, sniffing like a hound. I stared in horror as his bulk filled, then overflowed, the viewfinder. He was six feet away, then two, and finally his nose touched the branches. All I could hear was the sound of his breath. I felt as if I had suddenly been drained of all strength. I was incapable of movement, aware only of his breathing and the thunderous sound of blood rushing round inside my head. The outcome seemed clear. "He's going to catch my scent and kill me," I thought.



FIONA SUNQUIST

Within arm's reach, an Indian rhino with a reputation for killing people began to nibble the branches of the author's hiding place.

He opened his mouth, exposing two long, sharp teeth which lay almost flat against his lower jaw. "Just like enormous pig tusks," I thought irrelevantly, as he plucked a mouthful of leaves from my shelter. I could have reached out and touched his huge lips without straightening my arm. He munched and snuffled, while I leaned back as far as I could. I had visions of the blind being eaten away, slowly exposing me to his view, but there was nothing I could do. If I tried to make a run for it, he would almost certainly catch me, I knew. I closed my eyes and clamped my teeth together to stop them from chattering.

After he had eaten half of one side of the blind, he walked into some nearby bushes, feeding while I trembled, certain that he would pick up my scent now that he had moved downwind. Finally, he ambled out of view with the other rhinos, leaving me limp and sweating.

Less than an hour later, the elephant returned to pick me up. Bodai was taken aback at my incoherent cries of joy but tut-tutted when he saw the large footprints next to the blind.

It was only on the way back that I realized how incredibly lucky I had been. Out by the river, we met Triscar again, grazing stolidly in the tall reeds. This time, he snorted, lowered his head and charged. Our elephant trumpeted loudly and popped her trunk against the ground, warning that she was not intimidated by his threats. The rhino stopped, raised his head and sniffed, then lumbered off and began grazing again. ▣

Fiona Sunquist, a roving editor of this magazine, studied tigers for two years in Chitwan Park with her husband, biologist Mel Sunquist. This account was adapted from their forthcoming book, Tiger Moon *(copyright 1987, University of Chicago Press, all rights reserved). The book is scheduled for publication in the spring of 1988.*